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A  
DISCOURSE  
OF  
MIRACLES,

Considered as Evidence to prove the  
DIVINE ORIGINAL  
OF A  
REVELATION.

In which several Mistakes are rectified, and  
Deficiencies supplied, in  
Mr. *THO. CHUBB*'s  
Late Discourse on the same Subject.

ALSO  
An ATTEMPT to prove, that the single  
Circumstance of Non-Universality, is not suf-  
ficient to disprove the DIVINE ORIGINAL  
of a REVELATION.

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In a LETTER to Mr. *THO. CHUBB*.

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A  
L E T T E R  
T O  
Mr. *THOMAS CHUBB*,  
CONTAINING  
*Some Remarks upon his late Discourse  
of Miracles, &c.*

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S E C T. I.

S I R,

**A**FTER I had read over the preface to your Discourse of Miracles, my expectations were agreeably raised, with the thoughts of meeting (according to your own declaration) with the various reasonings upon the several questions with which the subject of Miracles, considered as evidences to prove the divine original of a revelation, is concerned, represented in a fair and candid light; especially, as you afterwards declare that your design is not to raise difficulties and make objections, and that you are not a party, nor interested on either side. But, after I had deliberately at-

tended to the method you have taken, in order to prosecute the above design, I was soon convinced, that you have exhibited to the world a very partial and imperfect view of that controversy; that is, I apprehend, you have not done justice to the doctrine of miracles, considered as evidences to prove the divine original of a revelation, when at the same time you have discovered some considerable degree of solicitude in favour of the contrary, as may easily be discerned through the whole of your performance; and which I hope to make more evident in the following lines.

Were it not for your above-cited declarations, I should be tempted to suspect, that you had really no design to exhibit the various reasonings with which the subject before us is concerned, but rather to overthrow, at all adventures, the evidence of Miracles, which could not be done, but by suppressing many arguments, which naturally concern the controversy.

But, as the design of a writer, abstractly considered from the method he pursues, cannot affect the controversy he engages in, I shall therefore, without any farther introduction, proceed to shew wherein, I apprehend, you have been exceedingly deficient, and to make such other remarks, as the controversy before us may require.



## S E C T. II.

**Y**O U enquire, Section III. ‘ Whether  
 ‘ there are any other invifible agents  
 ‘ but God, which can, or which do, at leaft,  
 ‘ act upon this globe. This enquiry ( *you fay* )  
 ‘ is exceeding difficult, feeing we have no foot-  
 ‘ fteps to trace, nor any thing to guide us in  
 ‘ our fearch after truth, with refpect to the  
 ‘ queftion before us; and confequently, neither  
 ‘ the negative, nor the affirmative fide of this  
 ‘ queftion, is to be taken for granted in order to  
 ‘ prove any other point; becaufe nothing can  
 ‘ certainly be concluded from either, feeing  
 ‘ that would be to draw certain conclufions from  
 ‘ uncertain principles.’

Upon which, I would beg leave to remark :  
 That in proportion to the obfcurity, or uncertainty, of any principles advanced, fo will be the inferences, or conclufions, drawn from fuch principles; nothing can be clear and unexceptionable in the confequence, that is not fo in the premife. From which juft confeffion of your own it will follow, that what you have advanced againft miracles, as evidences of the divine original of a revelation, is altogether precarious and uncertain; becaufe it is built upon what you yourfelf acknowledge to be a mere fuppoftion, from whence nothing can be fairly concluded.

In cafes of fmall moment, or where perfons contend merely to exercife themfelves in the arts  
 of

of disputation, it may not be improper to lay down principles, which in their own nature are uncertain, in order to discover what would be the consequences, upon a supposition that such, at present, uncertain principles should afterwards appear to be true. But in affairs of great moment and importance, as the subject before us certainly is, especially as you have made it public to the world, this method seems to be very unnatural, as it must necessarily leave the minds of the generality of readers in the same, if not in greater, uncertainty than before; for which reason it cannot be serving the cause of truth, seeing no distant truth can be discovered by creatures of our make, unless some one, or more, certain principles are advanced. Indeed had you proved the probability of your hypothesis, you would have done some service to the controversy; because then every fair and rational deduction, which might be drawn from thence, would have been equally probable with your hypothesis. On the contrary, tho' you have expressly declared, that neither the affirmative, nor the negative side of the above question is to be taken for granted; yet that you might state the argument *impartially* you have taken the affirmative, and have carried its consequences with an air of certitude thro' your whole performance. This same acknowledged precarious principle you have made the foundation of the following very grave enquiry, Sect. V. *viz.* ' Whether God will suffer invisible  
' agents to exert such power as they have (tho'  
' you acknowledge you are ignorant of the kind  
' and



‘ and degree of that power) when it is to be  
 ‘ exercised for the delusion of his creatures?’  
 The answer you give to that enquiry will be  
 considered in its place. And notwithstanding  
 your declared ignorance both of the kind and  
 degree of power invisible agents are capable of  
 exerting, yet you have all along supposed their  
 power to be so extensive, as not to be distin-  
 guished from divine power.

Sect. V. p. 27, 28. you infer thus: ‘ Either 1st,  
 ‘ That there are no invisible agents but God, which  
 ‘ can, or which do (at least) act upon this globe; or  
 ‘ if there are, or may be such, then it will follow,  
 ‘ 2dly, That miracles prove nothing in the pre-  
 ‘ sent case; because it will be uncertain with  
 ‘ respect to every miracle, whether God be the  
 ‘ agent in producing it or not. The first of these  
 ‘ inferences (you tell us) is a conclusion drawn  
 ‘ from doubtful and uncertain principles; that  
 ‘ there is no principle in nature or reason, from  
 ‘ whence the fore-mentioned point can be cer-  
 ‘ tainly inferr’d; and therefore that inference  
 ‘ (*viz.* that there is no other invisible agent but  
 ‘ God, which can, or which does act upon this  
 ‘ globe) must pass for a cipher in argument.’

The remarks I would make upon this citation  
 are these: You have supposed two opposite in-  
 ferences, the first of which you have rejected, be-  
 cause, you say, it is an inference drawn from  
 doubtful and uncertain premises; and that there  
 is no principle in nature, or reason from whence  
 it can be certainly inferred. The second infe-  
 rence you have retained, tho’ it is drawn, by  
 your

your own confession, from the same doubtful and uncertain premises with the former. However, it seems very clear, as I have before observed, that if the premises from whence two or more inferences are drawn, are doubtful and uncertain, those inferences will be as doubtful and uncertain as the premises, if fairly drawn. From whence it will follow, that your second inference, (*viz.* that there are other invisible agents besides God, which can, or which do, at least act upon this globe) as it is drawn from the same premises as the first, especially as there is no principle in nature, or reason, from which it can be certainly inferred, must pass, even upon your own principles, for a cipher in argument.

As upon these uncertain precarious principles, the whole of your arguments against the doctrine of miracles, as evidences of the divine original of a revelation, is built; permit me therefore, modestly to propose a method, which if you had taken, you would have saved me this trouble, as well as have prevented a censure, which many will think you deserve, as having placed the present argument in a very disadvantageous light.

As in every argument of moment and consequence to mankind, no uncertain principle should be supposed in order to prove a point in debate, seeing that would be to draw certain conclusions from uncertain principles; so, when two opposite principles, supposed to be equally probable, are presented, it is a great instance of partiality, and evidently tends to disguise the truth



truth sought after, to lay down one of them as a foundation for argument, and intirely suppress the other. This seems very evident; for the subject in debate can be seen but from one point only, when but one of those opposite principles is reasoned from; but, when the same conduct is observed with respect to both suppositions, then the point in dispute may be seen in as just and full a light, as those suppositions are capable of reflecting; and consequently, a more accurate judgment may be formed thereupon.

Certainly therefore, if you would have represented the various reasonings with which the subject of miracles, &c. is concerned in an impartial and candid manner, you ought not only to have supposed, that other invisible agents besides God, can, and do act upon this globe, but also, that other invisible agents besides God, cannot, and do not act upon this globe; and then have exhibited to us the various reasonings upon each respective Supposition. This would not only, have freed you from the charge of raising difficulties, and making objections, but would likewise have been of real advantage to the cause of truth.

As therefore, you have been very far from presenting the world with the various reasonings upon the subject before us; as the method you have taken visibly tends to disguise and perplex it, by raising false and partial ideas in the minds of unwary readers; permit me to supply a defect so detrimental to truth, by enquiring on which side of the following question, (*viz.*

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whether there are any other invifible agents but God, which can, or which do at leaft act upon this globe ?) the probability lies.

### S E C T. III.

**H**OW many different kinds, or orders, of intelligent beings actually exift, we have no poffible method to difcover; yet from the order and regularity of thofe works of the Almighty in the inanimate world which we are able to furvey, we may reasonably conclude, that the fame degree of wifdom is exercifed in the conftitution of the intellectual fyftem. Thofe orbs of light, with which the heavens are adorned, have each of them their refpective laws, by which is preferved from age to age, the moft beautiful order and harmony. Hitherto fhalt thou go, but no farther, is the language of God to all his works. If then, fuch a difplay of wifdom and design appears in the order and regularity of beings, and things around us; if each diftinct kind have their own proper fpheres of action affigned them, beyond which they have no power to exert; then, we may fairly reafon from analogy, that as this globe is the only fphere of our activity, beyond which we have no power to act, it is highly probable, that this globe is not the ftage appointed by the governour of the univerfe, for invifible beings to act their parts upon, the limits of whofe activity are doubtlefs circumfcribed as well as thofe of other beings. To which may be

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added,



added, that no good reason can be assigned for the acting of invisible beings upon this globe; seeing, from their different form of existence, they are manifestly designed for very different employments and pursuits, than what at present we, from our complex frame, are capable of wholly engaging our selves in. And, it seems to be most agreeable to perfect wisdom, as it cannot but be best adapted to promote order and uniformity, that those beings who are designed to have intercourses with each other, should have capacities sufficient for that purpose, otherwise that design must be in a great measure defeated. And, as it does not appear, that invisible agents can possibly be able to introduce any real good amongst mankind, without at the same time being able to be the cause of such a degree of evil, as will greatly exceed any good they may be the authors of; and as the same, nay a greater degree of good, can be easily communicated to us by God himself, and that without the possibility of any mixture of evil with it: If this is the case, then it will follow, that it is highly probable that God, as the natural guardian of our happiness, will not suffer invisible agents to interfere in the affairs of mankind.

This probability will be yet farther strengthened, if we attend more particularly to the consequences, which it is presumed may follow, if invisible agents besides God can, and do exercise upon this globe, that degree of power you have supposed them to be possessed of.

As invisible agents are free, so you have just-

ly supposed that some of them may be vicious. The idea that we must form of vicious beings, abstracted from body, is that they are proud, revengeful, malicious, mischievous, envious, and the like. Now, should the malicious, mischievous and envious, have the power you all along suppose, their invisibility would capacitate them to throw all the affairs of this our globe into the utmost confusion and disorder, and that without our being able to judge, whether such calamities came from the hand of an incensed angry God on account of our misconduct, or whether they were effected by some mischievous invisible being. The fate of empires, of kingdoms, as well as of families and single persons would depend upon their pleasure. Such vicious beings might destroy, even for the sake of doing so, those productions of nature which are the support of man and beast. Nay, by a sudden invisible stroke, or by various means, impossible for us to prevent, they might at pleasure deprive us of our present form of existence. And should we suppose, (with you) that they may be able to raise the dead; then, what should hinder them, from restoring life to those who were deprived thereof at the will of God, from whom they received their first existence; which would not only distract our minds with terrour and amazement, but would also introduce the utmost confusion and disorder among us.

That this, and such like, would be the behaviour of vicious invisible agents, had they power answerable, is very far from being improbable.



probable, tho' we, thro' our ignorance of their principles of action, cannot discover what advantages they should propose to themselves therefrom.

Is it not exceeding evident, that many among us, have, and do commit mischievous, nay, cruel actions, when it is absolutely impossible from the nature of those actions, that they should propose to themselves any advantage, besides the unnatural pleasure they take in the perpetration, and the delight they have in surveying the misfortunes and calamities of others? Then, tho' we cannot possibly discover, what advantages may arise to invisible agents from their distressing the inhabitants of this globe; yet, as we have instances of the like conduct among our selves, when no advantage is proposed, it is highly probable that they, had they power, would act in the same manner.

I would farther observe; that should virtuous invisible agents, out of a tender regard for the welfare and happiness of mankind, introduce a revelation, as from God, and attempt the spread thereof by miracles; such conduct would afford the vicious among them, a very pleasing opportunity to display their malice and revenge, in making use of the utmost extent of their power to counter-act, and so, if possible, render the whole design abortive; especially if they knew, or even suspected, that such a revelation was not, in fact, from God. It is highly probable, that in such a case, the vicious would be very indefatigable in pursuing such measures, as they thought most likely to expose the vir-

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tuous, as counterfeits and impostors, as well as daring and presumptuous, in fixing the sacred name of the most high God to their own inventions. The consequence of all which would be, that we should have miracles multiplied upon us from various quarters, as proofs or evidences of different revelations. Such would be our circumstances, if invisible agents could exercise such a degree of power upon this globe, as your argument supposes.

But farther : If the supposition is true, that other invisible agents besides God, can, and do act upon this globe in the manner you have suggested ; then it will follow, that even God himself cannot (should it appear expedient for him so to do) reveal himself to mankind, in any manner whatsoever, so, as that they should be rationally convinced that such a revelation is really divine ; they having no criterion, by which they can possibly distinguish a genuine, from a counterfeit revelation, since (as you say) prevalency of power is no proof of its being divine power. Should the Divine Being make a revelation of his will immediately to the mind of every individual of mankind, such a revelation, upon your principles, cannot be attested by any evidence superiour to what may attend a revelation made by inferiour invisible agents. Neither the manner of introducing such a revelation, nor the matter contained therein, will afford us any certainty as to the author of it. As to the manner, *viz.* its being suggested to the mind of every individual ; unless we were certain that it was beyond the capacity of all created



created beings, we cannot be sure but that some other beings besides God may be concerned. And from the matter contained in such a revelation, we can conclude nothing with any certainty ; for should a revelation be made to mankind, capable, if attended to, of introducing the most extensive, and permanent felicity, such a revelation, (if I may allow to other invisible agents besides God, the same degree of goodness and knowledge, as you have of power) will afford us no substantial proof of its author, seeing prevalency of goodness and knowledge is no proof of its being divine, any more than prevalency of power ; we being *equally* as ignorant of the utmost extent of the one, as we are of the other.

I conclude this Section with observing, That, as it appears, at least to me, that other invisible beings besides God, do not, and cannot interfere in the manner aforesaid, in the affairs of mankind ; it would be as proposterous in me to make any remarks upon what you have offered as reasons why vicious, or virtuous invisible agents may be prevailed upon to introduce a revelation amongst mankind as from God, as, I apprehend, it is illogical in you to assign any motives, which might be thought to prevail upon such beings so to act, until you have proved them to be possessed of a sufficient degree of power to that purpose. When therefore, you have sufficiently proved, that other invisible agents, besides God, are at full liberty to exercise such power as they have upon this our globe, it will be time enough to take into consideration those motives, which you have supposed

supposed may determine such beings to attempt the spread of a revelation under the counterfeit name of the most high God.

#### S E C T. IV.

**H**AVING in the preceding Section attempted to shew, that it is highly improbable that any other invisible agents, besides God, should be permitted to interfere in the affairs of mankind; I shall, in this, endeavour to rectify some mistakes in your 5th and 6th Sections upon the same subject.

In page 18, you have made the following enquiry, *viz.* ‘ Whether God will suffer them (invisible agents) to exert such power as they have, when it is to be exercised for the delusion of his creatures. And here, if we argue by analogy, that is, if we infer from his conduct in one case, how he will act in another; then it is plain, that God will suffer invisible agents to exert their power in serving what purposes they please.’

The case you refer to, is, that God does suffer men to delude each other; therefore you infer that he will suffer the delusions of invisible beings to take place likewise.

This Sir, I apprehend, is very far from reasoning analogically, tho’ your definition thereof is just; as will be easily discerned, by attending to the following premises with their respective conclusions. Men are capable of, and actually do delude others in every kind of delusion; this God suffers to take place; therefore, God will  
suffer



suffer a superiour kind and degree of delusion to take place likewise : or, God does permit a certain proportion, or degree of evil to take place upon this our globe ; which evil, in a great measure, results from the abuse of our respective capacities ; therefore, God will suffer a greater degree of evil to take place, by the intervention of superior beings, who are in no relation at all to us. Is it arguing from analogy to say, that because God does permit some degree of evil, that therefore he will permit every degree of evil to take place among us ! This is your reasoning.—Certainly, God may permit some degree of evil to take place among us, very consistently with his being the natural guardian of our happiness ; but then it may be very inconsistent with that character, for him to permit every degree of evil, which superior beings may be capable of introducing. For any thing that can be proved to the contrary, that present degree of evil, of various kinds, which mankind are exposed to, is all that is consistent for the natural guardian of our happiness to permit. To argue therefore, that because God suffers such a degree of evil, that therefore he will suffer more, is not reasoning, but presuming.

I humbly apprehend that you will easily see your defect in analogical reasoning, if you attend to the following specimen. Those things in the natural world, which are either hurtful, or beneficial to mankind, are, in general, most obvious ; and consequently, are easily avoided or obtained. And, as this conduct of the divine

Being is evidently calculated for our advantage, so we may infer by analogy, that God has so constituted the moral world, as, that mankind can easily apprehend whatsoever tends to their final happiness or misery.

Again, should the moon be inhabited with creatures of the same make with us; then we may infer from analogy, that seeing God does permit delusion, and various other kinds of evil to take place amongst us, therefore, he may, for the same reason, permit the same degree of evil to be introduced amongst them. So far analogy will lead us. But to say, that because God does permit a certain degree of evil to take place here, that therefore he will suffer a greater degree of evil to take place amongst the human inhabitants, is a mere presumption, and which will, if followed to its most remote consequences, oblige us to acknowledge, that there is no imaginable degree of evil but what God may, consistently with his paternal relation to us, suffer to take place amongst us. For if, because God permits some degree of evil to take place amongst us, that should be esteemed a sufficient reason why he will permit an additional degree to take place; this additional degree will be still a reason for his suffering the introduction of a yet greater degree, and so on *ad infinitum*.

I readily grant with you, Page 19, ' That  
' delusion is the same in itself, and as bad in its  
' consequences, to the person deluded, whether  
' the power which is the ground of that delusion  
' be



'be natural or supernatural.' But then, I apprehend that God cannot be so much concerned to prevent men from deluding, or being deluded by, one another, as he is to prevent such delusions which invisible beings may be disposed to spread amongst us. For, is there no difference in degree, between our being exposed to delusion from one quarter only, and our being exposed to delusion from more quarters than one? Is not the danger of our deception to be estimated in proportion to the number of our deceivers? It is certain, that if we have no other artifice to guard against, but that of our fellow creatures, there is not so much need of a divine interposure, nor is the goodness of God equally concerned, as when to the craft of one another, we have super-added the superior subtilty of invisible agents; unless it can be proved, that the goodness of God is equally concerned to prevent a comparatively small degree of evil, as a greater. This seems farther evident from the knowledge which we have, or may acquire in general, of the springs and reasons of men's actions. The motives, or reasons, to action have been, in different characters stations and complexions, the same in all ages; a general knowledge of which is sufficient, in a great measure, to detect and counter-act such plans and designs as are calculated to injure; and experience sufficiently assures us, that this end is very often obtained. But what ideas can we form of the make and complexions, the springs and motives to action, proper to invisible beings? Here we are at a loss, having no certain principle to guide us, and consequently, we must lie

very open and exposed to any attempts which they may make to delude and injure us.

From this short view of the case, it appears, that the goodness of God is more eminently concerned to prevent any attempt that may be made by invisible agents to delude us, than it possibly can, be to prevent our deluding each other. 1st, Because such beings make an addition to the number of our deceivers; the consequence of which is, that the hazard of our escaping being deluded is proportionally greater. And 2dly, When we are actually deluded by them, such delusion is additional to that which we are exposed to from one another.

As the argument you have introduced, Page 24, concerning free agency, may be thought of some importance in this branch of the controversy, permit me to give it a free examination.

Your words are these: ‘ Men will be at liberty whilst they are agents, to exercise their natural abilities in serving what purposes they please. Take away that liberty, and their free agency ceases, or is destroyed. And this must be the case of all intelligent free beings, whether visible, or invisible, and whether their natural power (that is, the power arising from their natural constitutions) be greater or less.’ On which I would observe; that the essence of free agency does not consist in the power of an intelligent being to perform any actions which terminate upon other beings, but principally, in the power of volition, and intention. That beings both visible and invisible, may will and intend to exercise their natural abilities in serving what purposes



purposes they please ; and should they be divested of this power, their agency would cease, or be destroyed, I grant. But then it may, and often does happen among us, by reason of the intervention of something unforeseen, that it is absolutely out of our power to accomplish our intentions. When this is the case then, tho' we may be deprived of that power which we intended to make use of, yet it will not be said that we are deprived of our free agency also. As thus: If the divine, or any other inferior being, should prevent me from putting any wicked design into execution, by lessening, or with-holding the power I am naturally possessed of, it will not follow from thence, that my free agency is either taken away, or destroyed ; because I shall, nevertheless, be criminal in the esteem of God for intending to commit an action which in its own nature is unfit to be done. Let us suppose that A, premeditately intends to take away the life of B ; an opportunity offers ; A presents a pistol, is just ready to give fire ; C coming in at that instant, snatches the pistol from A, and saves the life of B. Now, according to you, by the intervention of C, the free agency of A is destroyed ; and if so, then A can in no sense be guilty, or deserve punishment. As then, the use or abuse of our free agency is the foundation of rewards or punishments ; and as rewards or punishments may equitably take place, merely from the will and intention, without any act committed, it follows, that our free agency will not be taken away or destroyed, should God deprive us of the power we were possessed of at the  
time

time of willing or intending to perform any particular action. But according to the account you have given us of free agency, a man's power of acting must be always continued to him in the same degree he at any time enjoyed it, or, otherwise, he will cease to be a free being. But this consequence will by no means follow ; for then, if a person at 60 years of age should be possessed of less power than he enjoy'd at 30, he must for that reason be less a free agent than he was before ; especially if his power was lessened, or taken away by the Divine Being ; which I apprehend is not to be admitted.

Let us now apply this argument to the case before us.

If visible, or invisible beings should intend to make use of their power in order to accomplish any particular design ; yet God may, when such conduct could prevent his own design taking place, or without that reason, defeat such intentions by lessening their power, without destroying the free agency of such beings ; seeing to will, as to praise or dispraise, is to do ; which will always be the estimate of every impartial being : But this could not be the case, if the taking away, or with-holding the power of acting destroys free agency.

The case will also be the same, should we apply this argument to the power of working Miracles. If God should reveal his will to two, three, or more persons, and lay them under an obligation to make the same known to others ; at the same time enabling them to perform mi-



acles in attestation of the truth of such a revelation ; and should any one of these persons attempt to prostitute this miracle-working power to serve any base purpose, then God may, nay it is highly probable that he would, at the very instant, with-hold the power aforesaid, and so let him discern his crime by his disappointment ; seeing this may be done, without depriving him of his free agency ; a consequence you seem to be mightily afraid of.

These few hints, I apprehend, are sufficient to shew, that you have very much mistaken the true nature of free agency : I shall therefore conclude this section with just observing, that no ill consequence will follow upon a supposition that God should prevent free beings from exercising their natural abilities in serving what purposes they please, tho' it should be at the expence of their freedom. For certainly, if ever God deprives them of their freedom, it must be at a time when they were about to make use of it to very bad purposes, which by that means are prevented ; and as to themselves it can be no real injury, because while they remain destitute of free agency, they cannot be in any danger of incurring the displeasure of God, on account of their misconduct.

#### S E C T. V.

**Y**OU will easily see, that as it appears very improbable that any other invisible beings but God himself should interfere in the affairs of mankind, in the manner you have supposed, that  
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my next business must be to enquire into the extent of human power, or rather to enquire whether we are capable of distinguishing what is, from what is not within the power of man to perform.

I agree with you, that we are not proper judges, how far the natural ability of every man extends; yet, I think we may take upon us to determine how far the natural ability of man does not extend. Human ability does not extend so far, as to subvert, or change the established laws of nature, by which God governs the world in the course of his general providence. To this you seem to agree in your definition of a miracle, (*page 2.*) which is this: “ That it is a sensible effect, above the natural  
“ ability, or inherent power of man to perform; which is likewise above or besides the  
“ ordinary course of nature, or of those laws  
“ by which the natural world is governed in  
“ the course of God’s general providence.” Yet notwithstanding this, you are apprehensive, that if a man should rise up, and move thro’ the air, to the height, and with the swiftness of an eagle; or if he should command a mountain to remove out of its place, and to stand in the midst of the sea, and it should be removed accordingly, that these facts will not afford certain, but only a high degree of probable evidence that they are beyond the utmost extent of human power to perform. The reason you give, why it is highly probable that such facts are above the natural ability of mankind to perform, is “ because this power is greatly superior



“ riour to any power which has yet appeared  
 “ to be in man. And that there is but a bare  
 “ possibility, if that, of the contrary.”

From whence arises your suspicion that the above exploits are barely possible to be done by human powers only, I will not pretend to determine. However I apprehend that the reason you give that it is highly probable, that those facts are above the inherent power of man to perform, is very inadequate to that purpose.

For, tho’ we have never had one instance of such a degree of power, as is necessary to rise up, and move thro’ the air, &c. or to remove a mountain into the midst of the sea, as above; yet it will not follow merely from thence that we never may, if such exploits do not evidently subvert, or change, the settled laws and constitutions of nature by which God governs the natural world. But if, on the contrary, it appears that a man cannot rise up, and move thro’ the air to the height, and with the swiftness of an eagle; and that he cannot command a mountain to be removed out of its place into the midst of the sea, without subverting the settled laws and constitutions of nature: then it follows, that when such effects really take place, we shall have certain evidence (without a bare possibility of the contrary) that they do not only exceed all power which has yet appeared to be in man, but also that such effects are far beyond any power which ever will be in man.

The power of man is of two kinds; *first*, the powers of the mind; and, *secondly*, the power

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of

of the body. As to the powers of our minds, it is evident enough, that there is not the least connection, or relation between them, and the removing the lightest bodies from place to place. 'Tis one of the laws to which matter is subject, and by which the natural world is invariably governed, that it shall not be removed from its place, without the application of some force, or power, which is superiour to the resistance which the subject, intended to be displaced, necessarily makes from its weight and figure; but the powers and faculties of men's minds, having no relation to, or influence upon matter, therefore they cannot effect the most minute alteration, or produce the least motion whatsoever in matter. So that if we would rise up, and move thro' the air, (for as you have not called it flying, so I suppose you had no thoughts of wings) or remove a mountain out of its place into the midst of the sea, as above, we must necessarily apply a power superiour to the resistance we shall meet with, in either of the attempts. But, as our mental powers are not equal to the work, we must of necessity have recourse to our bodily powers, under the direction and guidance of our minds.

Let us then see, whether there is any possibility, that we should by strength of body effect either of the two cases referred to.

As to a man's rising up, and moving thro' the air to the height, and with the swiftness of an Eagle, there is no one so flighty, (unless your self) as to imagine that such an effect can  
be



be performed without the assistance of some very curious machinery ; which very contrivance, if such could be, would at once demonstrate the power not to be divine, but the effect of human attainments. But, on the contrary, should we see a person without any such assistance mount up into the air, no matter whether to the height or with the swiftness of an Eagle, I believe every spectator would readily acknowledge the fact to be genuinely miraculous, because it would contradict the known laws and constitutions of matter and motion ; laws which the most illiterate and vulgar are intimately acquainted with, and by which knowledge they always conduct themselves in the ordinary affairs of Life. Nor can you yourself avoid being convinced of the miraculous power necessary to produce such an effect, if you attend to, and judge consistently with, your own definition of a miracle, *pag. 2.*

Again : Should a person attempt by mere strength of body to remove a mountain out of its place into the midst of the sea, and he should succeed, it would be a strict demonstration, that such a person was possessed of more than human power ; because there is no proportion between the force of a man, and the resistance of a mountain. But should a person of an uncommon skill in mechanics frame a machine, that would produce such an effect, we should then know, from the very contrivance it self, that divine power was not at all concerned. So that in these two instances which you have thought proper to introduce, or in any similar

cases, we should never be at a loss to determine, and that with the greatest certainty, whether they were effected by the power of man, or by the power of God, seeing other invisible agents, are out of the present question. As therefore the cause must in all instances be equal to the effect supposed to be produced by that cause ; so when any effect is produced without any adequate cause, we may safely conclude that such an effect is beyond the utmost extent of human power to produce.

I am sensible that there are many effects produced, when the real cause of such effects is designedly concealed, and very often a fictitious cause may be assigned instead of the true one. Yet in all such cases, tho' the true cause should not be known, it will nevertheless be easy for the common people to discover, by the effect produced, whether it is beyond the limits of human capacity or not, tho' they may not be able precisely to ascertain the utmost extent of such power.

Should a man be seen to walk upon the surface of the sea, without any exteriour assistance, the most ignorant would unanimously conclude, that he must have some supernatural aid ; because they would know (supposing they could assign no other reason) that such an action contradicts the united, and herein infallible, experience of mankind. But those who had studied, tho' ever so little, the nature of fluids, and the gravitation of bodies, would from that knowledge at once declare the action to be impossible to be effected by any beings, but such, who were  
able



able to suspend the laws and constitutions of nature. So should a person, by speaking a word, raise a dead person to life, it would be past dispute, with those who will submit their judgments to any possible degree of evidence, that such an effect was not within the power of man to perform, for the aforesaid reason.

You will excuse me therefore, if I offer it as my opinion, that the reason why you have endeavoured to darken our conceptions of the difference between human and divine power, is, that if your suspicion about the acting of other invisible agents besides God upon this our globe should be rejected, you might have something else to have recourse to in order to render it uncertain whether God, or man, is the author of any action which may seem wonderful; and so by that means exclude miracles from being any evidence of the divine original of any revelation which has, or may hereafter be made to mankind.

Thus, as far as you have gone, I have endeavoured to shew that there will be no difficulty in determining between divine, and human power, tho' we cannot absolutely know how far the latter may extend; seeing we both agree that it cannot disturb the settled laws and constitutions of nature.

#### S E C T. VI.

**H**AVING shewn above, that the grand principle which you seemingly take for granted, *viz.* that other invisible agents besides God,

God, can and do act upon this globe, and upon which the greatest part of your discourse is built, is a principle not to be admitted in argument, to prove any other point by; seeing its opposite, *viz.* that other invisible agents besides God, do not, and cannot act upon this globe in the manner you have supposed, is a more rational hypothesis, as it secures to us that degree of quietude, happiness and order, which naturally result from our present situation, by preventing us from sustaining any additional degree of evil, to what arises from the present constitution of things; and as it ascribes to God the omnipotent and beneficent governour of the universe an uninterrupted rule and superintendency over men and things, (which could not be the case, if other beings besides himself could subvert the established laws of nature) and that without his being obliged, at any time, to destroy or take away the free agency of any of his creatures; whereas the hypothesis you have advanced makes it highly probable (for any thing that can be proved to the contrary) that the affairs in which mankind are concerned, would meet with such frequent interruptions from invisible beings, as would render their situation in this life one continued scene of perplexing doubts and terrifying apprehensions, and that without a possibility of any, even of the least redress from God, the acknowledged guardian of their happiness, unless he takes away, or destroys the free agency of such beings, which you cannot admit of. Having so far supplied your deficiencies, and rectified your mistakes, which is but doing justice to the  
argu-



argument before us, I now proceed briefly to shew what will be the consequence resulting from the hypothesis I have advanced, with respect to any revelation attested by miracles, which has, or may hereafter be made to mankind.

In the doing of which, it is utterly impossible to be tedious. For as you have justly observed, that if other invisible agents, besides God, are at liberty to exercise such power as they have (which power you have supposed to be sufficient to work miracles) in serving what purposes they please; then if a revelation attested by miracles, should be made to mankind, those miracles would not be sufficient to point out to us the true author of such a revelation; seeing it will be uncertain to us, whether they are divine operations or not\*: So I would observe, that if other invisible agents besides God, do not, and cannot exert such power as they have upon this globe, then it follows, that if a revelation attested by miracles should be introduced among mankind, we shall always be certain that such a revelation is truly divine, even tho' it should not be made universal; because no other being but God is able to subvert or change the natural order and constitution of things, tho' we may not be capable of discerning the true reasons of such conduct.

As therefore I acknowledge your inference is fairly drawn from your premises, so you cannot but own that mine is so also: but which of the two suppositions is the most probable, must be left to the judgments of our readers.

S E C T.

\* P. 21, 32, 33, of your *Disc.*

## S E C T. VII.

**L**EST it may be thought, that this single circumstance, *viz.* the non-universality of a revelation, tho' attended with miracles, affords a strong objection against the divinity of such a revelation, and consequently renders it highly probable that other invisible beings besides God can, and do interfere in the affairs of mankind ; and as it appears to many to impute great partiality and defect of benevolence in the deity ; permit me to take a view of that argument without any regard to the consequences which naturally follow from the supposition, that other invisible agents besides God, do not, and cannot act upon this globe, or the contrary.

You have observed, Page 47, 48, that, ' the  
 ' present constitution of things is the best, which  
 ' nature would admit of to answer the grand  
 ' design intended to be carried on thereby, *viz.*  
 ' a publick or general good ; and that the difference  
 ' between the capacities and circumstances  
 ' of men, which differently qualifies them to attain  
 ' happiness, results from the original frame  
 ' and constitution of things, and is perfectly accidental  
 ' with respect to each individual ; so  
 ' this is an evil which could not be provided against  
 ' without the introduction of some equal,  
 ' or greater evil ; and therefore if a more general  
 ' good would be carried on, by a revelation's  
 ' being given partially to some, than would be  
 ' by its being given generally to all ; and if the  
 ' giving of it generally to all, would be intro-  
 ' ductive



‘ ductive of some equal, or greater evil, than  
 ‘ what results from its being given partially to  
 ‘ some, if this appeared to be the case, then (you  
 ‘ justly enough infer that) these two supposed  
 ‘ cases would be parallel.’

That the present constitution of things is best calculated to promote a general good; that is, such different degrees of happiness, as God originally designed to capacitate different persons to attain to, I can readily grant: but that God ever intended, or is in justice or goodness obliged to give all men equal abilities and opportunities to attain to the same degrees of happiness, does not appear. Here the single question will be, whether the difference between the capacities and circumstances of men, which differently qualifies them to attain to happiness; and which (you say) is perfectly accidental with respect to each individual, is an evil that God might have prevented, without the introduction of some equal, or greater evil? I apprehend, that the affirmative side of this question is most probable. God can do whatsoever does not necessarily imply a contradiction; and as the supposition that all men might have been equally alike capacitated to obtain equal degrees of happiness, had God pleased, does not imply a contradiction, it will therefore lie upon you to prove, either that God could not have constituted things otherwise than what they are, or if he could, then it ought to be proved that an equal, or greater degree of evil, would be the necessary consequence of any other constitution of things than the present.

Should it be granted that the difference between the capacities and circumstances of men, which differently qualifies them to attain to happiness, is perfectly accidental, with respect to individuals, which, perhaps, in general is the case ; yet it will not follow from thence, that God could not from the beginning, without breaking in upon his original plan respecting men's circumstances, and the opportunities resulting from thence, have so interposed, as that, all things considered, every individual should be equally alike qualified to attain to equal degrees of happiness, and that without introducing any equal or greater evil. For instance ; tho' God should leave the circumstances of men in a casual situation, as they seem to be in at present, which, no doubt of it, with respect to the attainment of happiness are very different, yet he might, if he pleased, make the ballance exactly equal, by affording to those whose circumstances render them less qualified to attain to happiness, such an additional degree of mental capacity or occasional influences, as might be an equivalent to the advantage which others enjoy above them in circumstances.

That God might have done this, is self-evident, but he has not done it ; not because it would less qualify men to attain to equal degrees of happiness, that is a plain contradiction ; but because he originally intended to diversify the circumstances of mankind with respect to the attainment of different degrees of happiness, tho' in such a manner, as that the meanest should be qualified, if they are not wanting to themselves, to obtain happiness in opposition to misery.



fery. If then, God could have so acted, and that without introducing an equal or superiour evil, but has not done it; it will follow, if we argue from analogy, (that is, if we infer from what God has done, what he may do) that he may, consistently with benevolence, give a revelation of his mind and will to some nations, and deny it to others. So that the two supposed cases, *viz.* that of the difference between the capacities of men for attaining happiness without a revelation, and that of a revelation's being given to some only, are exactly parallel, seeing God could have supplied any seeming deficiencies in either case; and therefore it is as easy for us to account for his conduct in one case as in the other.

Farther: If it was in the power of God to have constituted things so, as that every individual should be equally qualified to obtain equal degrees of happiness, it will not follow from thence that he must so act; because if he has put it into the power of every individual to be happy in some degree (which he undoubtedly has) no one individual can justly charge him with defect of benevolence; seeing happiness, in any degree, is all that any of God's creation can lay a just claim to. If therefore God should at any time give a revelation to part of mankind only, in order to qualify them to obtain a greater degree of happiness, than what they could attain to without a revelation, it would afford no good argument against his universal benevolence; because those who are denied that advantage, have it nevertheless in their power to avoid misery,

and of rendering themselves happy in some degree or other. To affirm the contrary, would be to insinuate that God is obliged to put it into the power of every individual, as well visible as invisible, to attain to equal degrees of happiness; the consequence of which is, that God, as a wise and good being, cannot give existence to creatures of different capacities: for in proportion to the difference of their capacities, so will be their happiness, if such capacities are rightly improved.

There may, for any thing that can be proved to the contrary, be various ranks and orders of beings both above and beneath us, whose happiness will bear a proportion to their various and different capacities; and will it be said that God is less benevolent, because an inferior order is not capacitated to enjoy the same degree of happiness, with a superior. So with respect to beings of the same class; some of them may have capacities but little inferior to the meanest of the next order of beings above them; while the abilities of others, in the same rank, may be but one remove above the capacities of the most superior of the next class beneath them: Yet none of these can justly complain, since every individual is capable of that degree of happiness which is adequate to his capacity. So if God gives a revelation to some of his creatures, and not to others of the same class, it is no more than advancing them farther towards the next order of beings above them, in their capacities for happiness; but those who have not their capacities for happiness enlarged for want of revelation,  
are



are nevertheless capable of such degrees of felicity, as are adequate to their respective capacities.

The whole force of your reasoning on this head may be reduced to this, *viz.* That the different capacities and opportunities which men are possessed of, in order to obtain different degrees of happiness, could not have been in the nature of things, provided against, without the introduction of an equal or greater evil ; but as God can easily make a revelation universal, so there is no arguing from the former to the latter case. This would have been conclusive, had you proved that an equal, or greater degree of evil would attend every other possible constitution of things ; or that God is obliged, if he brings rational creatures into being, if it be possible, so to constitute things, as that they shall have it in their power to attain to equal degrees of happiness ; but as you have not made any attempt that way, and as the contrary opinion is most probable, it follows that the inferences you have drawn from thence, being destitute of proper support, must necessarily pass for ciphers in argument.

I now proceed to make some remarks upon an other argument, which you have made use of in order to disprove the divinity of a non-universal revelation. You tell us *pag.* 49. that  
 “ the generality of mankind spread up and down  
 “ upon the face of the earth, when considered  
 “ without a divine revelation, are supposed to  
 “ be attended with such great difficulties and  
 “ impediments, which stand in the way of  
 “ their future safety, as that they are in great  
 “ danger

“ danger not only of not attaining to the highest  
 “ degree of happiness which human nature is  
 “ capable of, but also of not attaining to any  
 “ degree of happiness at all ; yea they are in  
 “ great danger of falling into a state of great  
 “ and lasting misery. This either is, or is judged  
 “ to be the deplorable state of the generality  
 “ of mankind without a revelation.” The ques-  
 tion you form from this melancholy descrip-  
 tion of the situation of mankind, is, “ that if  
 “ God out of a tender regard for the well-  
 “ being of his creatures kindly interposed for  
 “ the relief of some, then the question is, whe-  
 “ ther that regard for his creatures well-being  
 “ would not equally dispose him to interpose  
 “ for the relief of all in those circumstances ? ”

Here, Sir, I would again remind you, that  
 the very point, which in justice to the argu-  
 ment ought to have been proved, is taken for  
 granted, tho’ by your manner of expression you  
 seem to indicate some doubt of the truth thereof,  
 as may be collected from the following citations.  
 “ The generality of mankind are *supposed* to be  
 “ attended with such great difficulties and im-  
 “ pediments, which stand in the way of their  
 “ future safety, &c.” This you acknowledge  
 to be a supposition only. And a little farther,  
 “ This either is, *or is judged to be*, the deplora-  
 “ ble state of the generality of mankind with-  
 “ out a revelation.”

The diffidence which is evidently contained  
 in these expressions demonstrates the necessity  
 you were under, in order to exhibit the va-  
 rious reasonings with which the present subject  
 is



is concerned, either to have freed your premise from the doubts with which it is encumbered by proving the truth of the fact, which would have secured the inference you deduce from it, from all those exceptions, which it is liable to meet with from the uncertainty of it ; or else to have supposed that the generality of mankind are not in the above deplorable circumstances ; that they are not in great danger of falling into a state of great and lasting misery ; but, on the contrary, that they have it in their power to attain to happiness in opposition to its contrary, and then have proceeded to make the following enquiry : If (supposing the circumstances of mankind to be as above) God gives a revelation of his will to some nations, in order to qualify them to obtain greater degrees of felicity than they possibly could without it, and at the same time denies it to other nations, who nevertheless have it in their power to be happy, whether such a revelation ought to be rejected, as containing evident marks of partiality and want of benevolence ?

This you ought to have done upon two accounts, *First*, from the diffidence you indicate with respect to the truth of the case ; and, *secondly*, as the several reasonings upon the argument are not fairly and ingenuously exhibited without it, and consequently any judgment formed therefrom, must be proportionally inaccurate and uncertain.

If it be objected, that if God should give a revelation to any, the same reason would as strongly induce him to give it to all, though  
they

they might be capable of attaining to happiness without it, seeing all men are in the same relation to him, and he is equally alike disposed to promote the happiness of all in like circumstances : To this I would reply thus ; That the equality of the circumstances of mankind is no argument that God must, to act consistently with universal benevolence, behave alike to all in this probationary state ; seeing his advancing one nation to a greater capacity for happiness is no real injury to another nation not so favoured, any more than if he had not given a revelation at all. This objection therefore will be of no force, till it is proved that God is obliged, as an impartial benevolent Being, to capacitate every individual of his intelligent creation, to obtain equally the same degrees of happiness one as another. Until this is proved, there will no argument lie against the divinity of a revelation from its non-universality.

But to return to the argument ;

Here it may be proper to enquire, supposing that the generality of mankind are in great danger of falling into a state of great and lasting misery, as above, whether this their danger arises from national and popular prejudices, erroneous and dangerous impressions, made upon their unexperienced minds in their tender years, and which are settled into powerful and inveterate habits, by time and the force of example ; or whether it is owing to the wilful abuse of that degree of light and knowledge, which, notwithstanding their prejudices, they are in the possession of ?

If



If the former should be assigned as the cause of that deplorable situation, which the generality of mankind are supposed to be in without a revelation, I would answer thus:

That tho' it may be a considerable misfortune, for us to receive our first existence among a degenerate people, from whom it is impossible but we must, while we are absolutely passive, receive also our first impressions, which no doubt will be a transcript of themselves; yet we cannot, if we form becoming conceptions of God, imagine that such impressions, tho' they may be erroneous, will in the least degree whatsoever endanger our future felicity, any more than that just and proper conceptions of God and our duty, when they are not the effect of choice and approbation, but the mere result of our first received impressions, will entitle us to his favour and approbation. When this is the case, the righteous judge of the universe will consider our frame, and remember that we are but dust; *i. e.* he will make all just and fit allowances for the almost invincible difficulties, which, especially in some complexions, hinder such persons from the discovery of truth, and right conduct. Those erroneous impressions which the mind received in its passive state, whether they are speculative or practical, will be so far from being a reason with God to condemn, that they will be an inducement to him to cast a very favourable eye upon such after-conduct as those impressions, in many instances, almost necessarily are the cause of. So that when the mind of man is considered as desti-

tute of the general knowledge of truth, duty, and happiness, which privation is the consequence of first impressions passively received, they cannot be justly said to be in great, or indeed in any danger at all, of falling into great and lasting misery upon that account. It follows therefore, that,

If the generality of mankind are in danger of falling into great and lasting misery, it must of necessity be for neglecting to use in a proper manner that degree of light and knowledge which they enjoy, seeing the wrong impressions which they received in their passive state will not render them obnoxious to punishment in the sight of a just and good God. So that let the danger be more or less that the generality of mankind are in, of falling into a state of great and lasting misery, it cannot be owing to the original constitution of things any otherwise, than as their being free-agents is part of that constitution; but to the various and different degrees of criminal indolence and inattention, which different persons thro' a prevalent regard to sense and appetite suffer themselves to be affected with. And as a prevalent regard to the gratification of sense and appetite, in opposition to a serious enquiry after truth, duty and happiness, must necessarily endanger the future welfare of all, who prefer the former to the latter; so it is no less evident, that these sensual gratifications may be carried to much greater lengths by one nation than by another; and as far as we are capable of judging, this ever was, and still is the case. If then, there is a very considerable  
diffe-



difference in the conduct and behaviour of different nations, it follows that the danger which they are in of falling into great and lasting misery is not equal, but bears a strict proportion to their conduct: The consequence of which is, that should a revelation be given to one nation, and not to another, that single circumstance will not disprove the divinity of such a revelation; because as different nations have differently improved their respective talents, so there cannot in the nature of things be the same reason for a revelation's being given to all nations, as there may for its being given to some only. Again; If the danger the generality, or any part of mankind, are in of falling into great and lasting misery, arises from their wilfully abusing the talents which they enjoy, which certainly is the case; and if others, from the contrary conduct, are comparatively in a state of favour with God, then some think that it is most consistent with just conceptions of deity, and of the doctrine of rewards and punishments, that if God gives a revelation to any, he should give it to those who have acted most agreeably to their rational character, not only as a reward of their obedience, and as a farther encouragement to engage them to future diligence, but also as a super-added qualification for obtaining more extensive degrees of happiness. And as there appears to be a very great difference in the moral conduct of different nations, so some may, for any thing that appears to the contrary, by an obstinate continuance in a course of wrong conduct, put themselves into such a situation,

as that they may be in no sense fit and proper subjects for the display of pity and compassion, unless it can be proved to be consonant to infinite wisdom, to observe the very same conduct towards the most obstinate, incorrigible offenders, as to those, whose offences are not attended with the same degree of aggravation.

To which may be added, that if misery introduced as above, that is, by a wilful abuse of our talents, will be a sufficient motive with God to exercise pity and compassion towards us, then any superiour degree of misery, into which any part of mankind have brought themselves, will be a motive with God to display a greater degree of pity and compassion, than to those who have not rendered themselves miserable in the same degree.

The result of which is, if we view it in its most remote consequences, that God cannot, consistent with his native pity and compassion, deny giving additional favours to any, but on the contrary must be continually expressing kindness and compassion to his most obstinate perverse creatures through the whole of their existence; which, if true, it will follow that God does not observe a proper difference of conduct to different characters, nor take the most wise methods to encourage virtue and to discourage vice. If then, as I have hinted above, there is a visible and great difference between the moral conduct and behaviour of different nations, and if it be just from thence to infer, that they are not equally alike in danger of falling into great and lasting misery; if a revelation may, consistent with infinite wisdom, be



be given to some (whose conduct when compared with others is greatly to be preferr'd) in order to farther qualify them to obtain a greater degree of happiness than otherwise they could attain to, as a reward for their former diligence; and if some may, by an obstinate abuse of their powers and capacities, exclude themselves from any additional kind notices from God, (which has been, and therefore may again be the case, if we may give credit to the reasons which *Moses* gives us of the deluge) or if it should be thought most fit for God to give a revelation to those who most abuse the talents which they enjoy without a revelation; if the whole or any of these particulars be granted, it will follow as an unavoidable consequence, that should a revelation be promulged to one or more nations, and be denied to others, it may nevertheless be the effect of infinite wisdom and goodness. This inference cannot be fairly superseded by any thing short of a plain proof, that all mankind are not only in danger of falling into great and lasting misery; but also that their danger is exactly the same in degree. —

Farther, the aforesaid deplorable description of the condition of the generality of mankind without a revelation is, you tell us, supposed to be the real case. Upon which I would remark, that whether this supposition be your own, or the supposition of others, it must, while it continues a mere supposition, pass, even upon your own principles, for a cipher in argument; because to infer any thing from it, is to draw certain conclusions from uncertain principles.

I am indeed sensible, that many Gentlemen not only believe that mankind without a revelation are in great danger of falling into a state of great and lasting misery, but also that those of mankind who enjoy a revelation are nevertheless in the same danger; nor can they be possibly extricated therefrom, but by an irresistible impulse from above, and which danger, they say, is owing primarily to a transgression of our first parents. Now, Sir, if your discourse was wrote for the peculiar and sole use of persons of this turn of thought, then a formal proof of your supposition would have been needless, it being granted; but if you designed it for general benefit and advantage, you ought to have attempted, at least, to prove the truth of your supposition, if you had any regard to the reception of the consequences you have deduced from thence.

As to those persons who give to you the question, which you have manifestly begged, 'tis they only who must be answerable for the consequences. Such persons would do well either to deny the supposition, or embrace the consequences, or else demonstrate the fallacy of your deductions. And as those who reject your supposition, as a manifest misrepresentation of the condition of the generality of mankind, you cannot expect that they should pay any great regard to the purposes which you have endeavoured to make it subservient to.

But farther: If the non-universality of any revelation which has been, or may hereafter be made



to mankind, affords sufficient evidence against its divine original; it will unavoidably follow, that should a revelation consistent and unexceptionable in all its parts, and attested by miracles, be given to mankind in this, or any other age; and should it be spread over the face of the whole habitable earth; should this be the case, such a revelation cannot be received, upon your principles, as truly divine, unless there was a probability that the generations who existed antecedent to the giving forth such a revelation, were not in danger of falling into great and lasting misery. If it should seem probable (after having compared the conduct as far as we are able, of those who lived before this revelation was given, with those who really enjoyed it,) that the generations, to whom God did not reveal himself, were not in such dangerous circumstances as those were, to whom he did reveal himself; then in that case a revelation, which was well attested, might be received as of divine authority; because those generations, which passed away antecedent to such a revelation's taking place, were not in like circumstances with the other. But on the contrary, if it should appear to us upon enquiry, that the generality of mankind have in all ages pretty near alike conducted themselves, then it will follow that if a non-universal revelation indicates great partiality and defect of benevolence in the revealer, we cannot receive any revelation, which has been, or which may be hereafter made to mankind, as divine, because it ought to have been as universal

versal with respect to time as place. But although this enquiry is attended with many difficulties, yet it seems most probable that there has been and still is, a very considerable difference between the conduct and behaviour of different nations; *i. e.* that some nations have acted much more agreeably to the talents they have enjoyed than others have done; and if this be true, it will follow that a revelation is not to be rejected merely on account of its non-universality;—because all mankind are not in like circumstances.

Upon the whole; if it is probable that there is a great difference in the moral conduct and behaviour of different nations; and if this difference renders them more or less obnoxious to the displeasure of God; and consequently their danger of falling into great and lasting misery cannot be equal; and if we are not adequate judges with respect to the difference between the conduct of the several nations of the world: then it is most rational to believe such a revelation to be from God, which is every way consistent in its parts, is attested by miracles, and manifestly tends to secure to all, who genuinely embrace it, the highest and most permanent felicity, even though it should not be universal.

#### S E C T. VIII.

**A**S in your XIth Section, you have given us a melancholy description of the condition of the generality of mankind, in order to explode any revelation, which should not be



be made universal; so in your XIIIth Section; you have laboured to render all human testimony, in the case of miracles, absolutely insufficient to beget a rational and well-grounded belief, by giving us such a sketch of the make of man, as would, if just, render every fact we are conversant about in life doubtful and uncertain even to our selves. If a man can imagine that he sees and hears, feels, tastes, and smells what in reality he does not, *page 72.* then he may also imagine that he does not see and hear, feel, taste, and smell, what in fact he does: For if the imagination can create, or seem to create such ideas in the mind, as usually are impressed by sensible objects, it may also, for the same reason, render the mind imperceptible of those ideas, which we suppose naturally to take place from the impressions of sensible objects; the consequence of which is, that we can never be certain whether any supposed facts are real, or whether they are not the mere creatures of the imagination, tho' we should be actually upon the spot. This, indeed, you say, may *sometimes* be the case when we are neither asleep, in the height of a fever, or in the depth of melancholy. The instance you give, is, " when  
 " something that is wonderful and surprizing  
 " strikes the imagination strongly, &c. then  
 " the imagination sometimes so far prevails, as  
 " to mislead the judgment, and men become  
 " as certain (with regard to the persuasion of  
 " their own minds) of what is merely fictitious,  
 " as they are of those facts which are real and  
 " certain in themselves." *Page 73.*

That men may be so far disordered either by a fever, melancholy, or sudden surprize, as not to be able, whilst such disorders continue, to form just and regular conceptions of what may be presented to them, as well as be liable to give real existence to mere creatures of the imagination, I can grant. But nevertheless, this observation ought not in justice to lessen our regards to the evidence of the truth of facts which we receive from our senses. For as when a person is disordered, as above, his judgment, while he is in that condition, is not to be depended upon by others, so neither will he himself, when he is recovered from such disorders, lay any stress upon those impressions which might seem to be made upon his mind, when it was in a disordered state. Nay it is very often seen, that when a person is recovered from a violent surprize, he does not retain any distinct impressions of what affected his imagination when in that condition.

However, altho' your last cited observation may be of some use in order to lessen men's credulity with respect to facts, which they might be spectators of when their minds were disordered by surprize; yet it will not be sufficient to raise any doubts in our minds of the reality of a series of facts occasionally performed before a great number of spectators; because when there are various facts performed at different times in the presence of many persons, it is next to impossible, by any contrivance imaginable, so to disturb the imaginations of all present, as to prevent some among them from discovering the fraud,



fraud, if there was any; and consequently we are in no great danger of any deception from that quarter.

You add farther, "That as men are thus capable of misleading themselves, so sometimes and under some circumstances the delusion is catching. It is but to report to others what we imagine we see and hear, and they instantly imagine that they see and hear the same things, &c." *pag. 73.* To which I would reply thus: That if ever the above delusion is catching, it must be when persons are fitly prepared to receive it; as thus: When a person's imagination is disordered, by the appearance of something surprising in such a manner, as that he imagines he sees and hears what in reality he does not, then in order to spread this delusion with success, it is absolutely necessary that some method should be taken to terrify the minds and disorder the imaginations in the same degree, of those to whom he makes the report; for while nothing disturbs the imagination, and the mind is properly disposed to receive impressions from the senses, there is no possibility of catching the delusion.

The time when the above delusion is catching, (you tell us) is "when a nation is threatned with a foreign invasion, or when the people's fears are any otherways alarmed with the expectation of war; if one imagines that he sees armies fighting in the clouds, and if he reports it to others, then they are apt to imagine that they see the same." *Pag. 74.*

I apprehend that the present situation of affairs affords a very proper opportunity to make the experiment. That *France* will soon declare war against *England*, is expected by many, the consequences of which have, it is very evident, greatly alarmed the fears of some!

And as there is no person more proper than your self, it may perhaps be worth your while, to collect together a number of persons who most dread such a war, and report to them that you actually see armies fighting in the clouds, no matter whether you do or not; and that you may have all necessary advantages, I would advise you to make the experiment when the sky is diversified with moving clouds: You will then, I am persuaded, be convinced, that notwithstanding their fears of a foreign invasion, they will pay but little regard to your assertions; on the contrary, they will be guided by their own senses; and perhaps you may be rewarded with such censures, as may not be much to your advantage.

That reports have been spread that armies have been seen fighting in the clouds, is evident; to which I suppose you refer. But the whole of such reports will amount to no more than this, that the clouds at that time underwent such transfigurations, as made them somewhat resemble armies engaged in war; but I never could learn that the most credulous spectators of those appearances advanced their belief above a bare resemblance of such actions. And what there is in all this to render the testimony of our senses uncertain with respect to miracles, I  
am



am not able to discern. Therefore as you have not proved that our senses are not to be trusted with respect to miracles, when our minds are properly disposed to receive impressions from without ; and as men are generally prone to correct any false or imaginary impressions which they may have received when the mind was disordered, as soon as they are capable of exercising regularly their mental capacities ; it follows, that what you have advanced on this head can be of no manner of importance in the present argument.

You have made a transition, *pag.* 74. from such facts, which we our selves are supposed to be witnesses of, to such, which may be considered as miraculous from the report of others : Where you observe, that if the story of them has passed thro' several hands, this must render those facts more uncertain.

This your conclusion will, I apprehend, by no means follow : For should it be granted, then it is evident that the fewer hands a narrative passes thro', the stronger will be the evidence for the truth thereof ; and consequently, by parity of reasoning, the evidence to the truth of a fact must be strongest, when we receive the report but from one person only. Now when a report has passed thro' several hands, without any variation, then it may be justly presumed, that if the fact reported had not really been effected, some among them would have been disposed and able to detect the fallacy ; and consequently the probability of the truth of such a fact must be greater, than if the report had passed thro'  
but

but few hands, who might not for many reasons be disposed to make such a scrutiny, as the nature of the case required.

The reason which you seem to give for your above assertion is as follows: "For though we  
" may be assured of our own honesty and integrity, with regard to the point in hand,  
" yet we cannot be alike assured of the honesty and integrity of other men." *page 75.*  
This I grant. But does that prove that a fact is the more uncertain for having been reported by several, or many persons?

When the truth of a fact is attested by few persons, a suspicion may arise, that those persons were some way or other prompted on to spread the report for the sake of interest, or they might not be qualified to make an exact scrutiny into the reality of such a report; but when many persons, of different capacities, interests and opinions, shall report the same thing, then the aforementioned suspicion will be comparatively groundless, because it is not so likely that many persons should conspire together to attest a falsehood, as that a few should; and because it is highly probable that if the report of such facts was false, some among them would be both able and willing to detect the fraud. Again, when the truth of a fact is attested by several persons, who from the best account we can get of their capacities and conduct appear to be too sagacious to be deceived, as well as too conscientious to invent and carry on a deception; and if it should also appear that no one of these persons were ever known to deny what they had  
before



before asserted, with respect to facts said to be done, (a common case where many persons are intrusted with a secret ;) if facts reported by such persons should be believed and reported likewise by their contemporaries, who many of them had capacity to expose the combination, if there was any ; and if the same reports should without any variation be handed down from age to age : When this is the case, the evidence of the truth of such reports will be stronger, than if such reports had passed thro', comparatively, but few hands. For tho', as you say, *page 75.* " The getting and preserving worldly wealth, &c. " are not the only springs from which dissimulation and impositions may arise, seeing men " have other passions which excite as strongly, " and perhaps, to persons of some tempers and " constitutions, more strongly than these : " Yet when the same facts are reported as true by some, whose chief views are interest, by others whose motives are imaginary glory and applause, and by others who are excited thereto from an un-adulterated love of truth ; when this is the case, we cannot justly conclude any thing against the truth of such reports, merely because some men may make truth and religion subservient to the gratification of their present, and several, interests and desires. The facts themselves may nevertheless be true, tho' they are reported by persons of different complexion, and who are consequently disposed to act from different, nay, sometimes, opposite principles.

To conclude this Section. I cannot discern that facts become the more uncertain, *i. e.* are less

less to be regarded as true by us, for having passed through different hands, when the account of such facts is transmitted to us without variation, and also exactly agrees with the reports of those, who affirm themselves to have been eye-witnesses thereof.

### S E C T. IX.

**H**AVING in the precedent Section remarked upon what you have offered, with respect to the deceptions which may take place from the senses, and imagination; and having likewise hinted at the regard we ought to pay to the truth of facts, the report of which has passed thro' several hands; I shall take up this, in suggesting a few cases, the circumstances of which either strengthen or weaken our belief of the truth thereof. Whether any, or all of them are applicable to the revelation of *Jesus Christ*, (for I do not pretend to have no views to that dispensation in this discourse) every one must judge for himself.

Should there appear among us, persons possessed of a supposed miracle-working power, which power they should frequently exercise, not in the dark, or in a corner, or before two or three witnesses; but in the presence of great numbers casually assembled, as opportunity might offer; the reports which such persons, at different times, would make concerning the miracles which they saw, or imagined they saw performed, would naturally raise and excite the curiosity of persons of sagacity and pene-



penetration (should there be none present, which can hardly be supposed among a great number) not only to make the most exact scrutiny into the circumstances of facts already past, but also to endeavour to be present at the performing of some future ones (more especially if they found that the reports of such facts gained reputation, and that the populace were like to be captivated thereby) in order that they might exert their utmost skill to prevent deception if there was any. When this is the case, it is next to impossible to continue a fraud, and consequently the evidence for the truth of such miracles will rise exceeding high. Again,

If all the persons, who testify the truth of such facts, are likely to be gainers, should such reports be credited, then a suspicion may arise, that they are engaged in a defence of those facts, merely from mercenary expectations; and consequently the degree of credibility in such a case will be very low: But if, on the other hand, it should appear, that there are many who vindicate the truth of the same facts, who are so far from acting upon mercenary principles, that they are manifest sufferers for spreading such reports; and if many of those who report the truth of such facts do nevertheless reject the doctrines which are taught by such miracle-workers, with manifest indications of the most inveterate prejudices; then the probability of the truth of such reports will rise very high in the opinion of impartial persons. For

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tho' it should be granted that " some men have  
 " passions, which excite as strongly, and, per-  
 " haps, to persons of some tempers, and consti-  
 " tutions, more strongly, than the desire of get-  
 " ting, and preserving worldly wealth, and  
 " the securing life with its enjoyments : " \* Yet  
 when the same facts, which are reported as  
 true by persons of such a complexion, are al-  
 so reported as true by others, who no ways  
 concern themselves therein, but only as specta-  
 tors and reporters ; and, who tho' they are con-  
 vinced of the facts, yet nevertheless oppose the  
 workers thereof, with all their power and in-  
 terest ; then tho' some men may be actuated by  
 principles different from, or opposite to the  
 views of worldly gain, yet these cannot be in-  
 fluenced by either. Again,

Facts, said to be miraculous, may be per-  
 formed among an enslaved people, strongly pos-  
 sessed with a belief that God would so far espouse  
 their cause, as to send them a mighty con-  
 queror and deliverer, who, after having rescued  
 them from their oppressors, should rule over  
 them as their king. Should a person make his  
 appearance, and that a very despicable one, a-  
 mong a people thus circumstanced and preju-  
 diced, declaring himself to be the very King  
 which they expected, yet insinuating that his  
 kingdom was not of this world, by which the  
 greatest part of them should disown and reject  
 him as their saviour and deliverer, yet never-  
 theless

\* See Page 75.



theless be convinced that the wonders he performed were really miraculous, and report them as such; the evidence in favour of the truth of such facts will be liable to very little objection. For in such a case men from their prejudices, and abortive expectations, would be very strongly excited, (if not for the sake of truth) to scrutinize into the nature of the facts performed, with a most ardent desire of proving the person who performs them thro' the whole of his conduct an Impostor: And if ever this happens when a whole nation is concerned, it is next to impossible that a fraud should escape their notice.—Again,

A man may be reported to have done several wonders of the same kind, with very little or no variation of circumstances, and which may be expressive of nothing more than mere power: and the spectators may be placed by the operator so, as that they shall not have a proper medium thro' which to survey the performance to advantage: Or the wonders said to be performed may be such as have no similitude one to another, and may also have a manifest tendency to create in the spectators universal charity, benevolence, and mercy, and may also be performed without any *apparatus*, the spectators situating themselves as they please. The former of these weakens, and the latter very much strengthens, the credibility of such reports. Again,

A man may spread a report abroad, that at such a time and place he intends, by a word speaking, to restore sight to one who was born blind, or by the same means to heal a person, who was lame from his birth: Or, he may without any previous notice, as occasion may offer, restore sight to the former, and heal the latter, such who were universally known to be in those circumstances, by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood where such facts are said to have been performed. The former of these cases, it is easy to see, may admit of a fraud by confederacy, whereas, in the latter case, it is absolutely impossible. Again,

Various facts, or miracles, may be said to have been performed by the same person, the circumstances of which may seem greatly to differ in their degrees of credibility; some of them may be performed in the presence of friends only, being intended more immediately for their benefit; which circumstance may be thought to weaken the evidence for the truth of such facts. The power exercised in working some of them may seem to approach so near, as not, with certainty, to be distinguishable from the natural and inherent power and ability of mankind; and this also may be thought to weaken the proof of such facts being truly miraculous. Others, and those the far greater number, being designed  
for



for more general notice and advantage, may be performed in the presence of a promiscuous multitude casually assembled ; and the power put forth may evidently suspend, or invert, the established laws of the natural world. When this is the case, with respect to a series of facts, said to be miraculous, performed by the same hand, it will follow, that the credibility of such facts being truly miraculous will by no means be weakened by the seeming dubious circumstances, which may attend some of them ; seeing the circumstances which belong to others, and those far more in number, render it impossible that they should be effected by any power inferior to divine. For tho' divine power may not be so conspicuously displayed in one fact or miracle, as it may be in another, which from the nature of things will ever be the case ; yet it is very absurd to imagine, that a person who is possessed of a genuine miracle-working power, should make any attempts to counterfeit such power ; because he must know that should he once be detected, it would be next to impossible for him to eradicate the prejudices which the people would have justly entertained against him ; and consequently should he afterwards perform real miracles, they would make but very faint, if any, impressions upon the minds of the populace. Seeing, then, that miracles in  
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the nature of things will not alike display divine power, some of them leaving not the least doubt in the mind, while others are not equally convincing; and as it is presumed that no person would counterfeit a miracle that was able to effect a real one; so some think, that what some miracles, from the peculiar circumstances belonging to them, may seem to want in order to prove them to be divine, may be rationally enough transferred to them from those miracles, the circumstances of which evidently demonstrate their divinity.

#### S E C T. X.

**I** Shall conclude these remarks, with a few observations upon the surprising miracle said to be performed in the *Severnes*, as attested by *John Cavalier of Sauve*, on *January 31, 1706*, at *London*; taken from *Mr. Lacy's Book*, entitled, *A Cry from the Desert*, &c. which miracle, you have seemingly opposed to that of the resurrection of *Christ*: Upon which account, I shall exhibit the several ways in which a fraud may possibly be supposed to be carried on in either case: by which method it will be seen, which of the two supposed miracles deserves most to be regarded.

Previous



Previous to which, I would observe, *1st*, That as our belief of either of these miracles may be thought pretty much to depend upon the ability, and honesty of the relaters; so I shall pay no regard to one above the other in those respects.

*2dly*, It must, I think, be admitted that among the number of people, who either saw, or supposed they saw, Mr. *Clary* in the flames, or that saw, or believed they saw, *Christ* alive after his crucifixion, much the greater number of them were not let into the nature of the fraud intended to be perpetrated, if there was any; for to suppose that any deception can be successfully carried on, where so many persons are let into the secret, is very absurd, and such conduct would indicate great want of capacity and ignorance of human nature in the first contrivers of such deceptions.

We must therefore suppose that if the two aforesaid miracles were not real, that the secret thereof lay but in few hands; or however, that there were many persons whose senses it was necessary to deceive, in order that the report might be confidently spread abroad to advantage.

Let us then examine what method could possibly be taken, in each case, by those who were privy to the fraud, if there was any, in order that they might deceive those who were not privy thereto. *1st*, Let us consider the case of Mr. *Clary*. He, as the narrative of his friends

in-

informs us, was in the midst of a fire, kindled for that purpose by themselves, at least a quarter of an hour; after which he came forth without the least hurt. If this was a fraud, let us see how it might be carried on. It would be preposterous in me to suggest this as one way, *viz.* that the people's minds were disordered in such a manner by the terrifying apprehensions of the fiery trial, that they really imagin'd they saw what in fact they did not, having already offered something against the probability of deception from that quarter; though this circumstance may possibly render your belief of this miracle something difficult upon your own principles; while the same ground of distrust cannot take place with respect to the resurrection of Christ, because we know of nothing that intervened, between his crucifixion and supposed resurrection, that had any tendency to disorder the imagination in the manner above specified.

There are but two ways that I know of, by which a fraud in the present case could be committed; but whether they are sufficient to shake the credit of the miracle, I am not about to determine.

The 1<sup>st</sup> is, the spectators might be so situated, and the smoke so driven by the wind, the advantage of which might be taken, as that *Clary* might seem to them to be in, when in fact he was on the other side, the fire. The narrative, indeed, says, that the assembly made a circle round the fire; but this  
ought



ought not to be regarded in the present case; for those who will carry on a deception, will not refuse to confirm it as true, by false assertions.

But upon a supposition that the narrative is true in this particular, and that every person was so situated as that a fraud of that kind could not have been carried on without being detected: then 2dly,

As I my self, together with some hundreds, have seen the force of fire resisted without any injury received; and that by one, who only procured a few pence by the exploit, by applying a certain preparation to the part upon which the experiment was to be tried: As this is a well-known case, it must greatly lessen the credit of the aforesaid miracle, because there is no difficulty of coming at the same secret. To which I will only add, that though the narrative mentions a quarter of an hour in which *Clary* was in the flames, yet it is only by computation; and the concern the author of the said narrative, allowing his veracity, must necessarily be in at the awful spectacle, (which generally makes the time seem much longer than it really is,) may reasonably reduce it to ten minutes at most. Farther,

It may not be amiss to observe, that Mr. *Cavalier* ordered wood to be got immediately for a pile, which when they had got together,

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ther,

ther, consisting of large as well as small sticks, and had heaped them up, *Clary* put himself upon the top of the said pile. A few remarks upon this part of the narrative seem necessary.

*First*, If more than a few sticks composed this pile, then some will not easily be brought to believe that it was consumed within so little time as a quarter of an hour. And,

*2dly*, As the voucher gives the materials of which this fire was made the name of a pile, and tells us likewise that the top therefore supported *Clary*, it necessarily supposes that the said pile was erected methodically, and also that it was of some moderate height: For had it been thrown together in a confused manner, *Clary* could not have stood fast upon the top; and had it contained only a few sticks, which must have been the case, if they were consumed in a quarter of an hour, then there would have been no need of distinguishing the top from any other part thereof, seeing no part of such a small quantity could well deserve that distinction.

Farther, *3dly*, That this pile was not a very small one, is evident from the narrative itself; for though *Clary* had placed himself upon the top of it, yet we are told, that, “ every  
“ one in the assembly might see him stand  
“ surrounded with flames that rose much a-  
“ bove his head.” Had *Clary* been situated  
at



at the bottom of the pile, a smaller quantity of wood might have had this effect. The narrative farther informs us, that he did not come out of the fire, till the wood was quite spent; yet this all was within the compass of fifteen minutes. The enquiry necessary from all this is, whether a quantity of wood capable of supporting a man on its top, and deserving the name of a pile, could possibly be consumed in so short a time as a quarter of an hour? But that I shall leave to others to determine, and proceed with the same freedom to take a view of some of the circumstances of Christ's resurrection, in order to see whether a fraud is equally probable in that case as in the other.

And here I would beg leave to repeat what I have offer'd above; that in this, as well as in the case of *Clary*, some are deceivers, others are deceived. What method then must the Apostles of Christ have pursued, who, no doubt of it, were first privy to the fraud, if it was one, in order to deceive the senses of those who where not privy thereto?

There appear to me, at present, but two ways of doing this, though but one of them is properly a deception of the Apostles. The first is, that Christ might possibly have survived his crucifixion, which unexpected event might prompt him on to feign a resurrection, though he never was in the state of the dead, and so deceive all his followers in gene-

ral ; for it is not to be supposed that if this was the case, he would disclose the secret to any.

Let us consider how far this is a probable case. *Clary's* fire indeed was kindled by his own direction, and that among friends: Our LORD was hung upon a cross by, and in the midst of, his most inveterate, and avowed enemies, who, no doubt of it, in order to satiate their malice and revenge, would take sufficient care to see him expire. To which, if we add the manner of crucifying malefactors in use at that time, which is too well known to need a description; then the enquiry is, whether it is probable, the aforesaid circumstances considered, that our LORD could survive his crucifixion.

But if it should be thought most probable that Christ really expired upon the cross, then it was necessary, after they had sufficiently prevented his dead body from being discovered, to procure some person capable of personating the deceased, so as to deceive numbers to whom he was perfectly known; and not only so, but also to counterfeit the wounds both in hands and feet, which were made in the hands and feet of *Christ*; because it might naturally be presumed, that one or another among them would have curiosity enough to make a strict enquiry.

Whe-



Whether in either of these two cases, there is any, even the least degree of probability, that a fraud could be successfully carried on, is left to the judgment of others to determine.

Thus, Sir, I have taken the liberty to remark with the utmost freedom, upon what seems to me to be of the most importance in your late discourse of miracles.

In which, if I have offered any thing whereby the truth, which I hope we are both in quest of, may be more easily discerned, I am persuaded that it will meet with your approbation; but if not, yet as I am conscious that I have advanced nothing but what at present appears to me with sufficient evidence, I shall rest satisfied in having meant well.

*I am, S I R,*

*Yours, &c.*

*F I N I S.*

12 MR 58



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